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First Annual Right Whale Festival in Jacksonville Beach, Fla.

The first annual Right Whale Festival will be held on Dec. 5, 2009 from 10 a.m. through 4 p.m. at the Sea Walk Pavilion in Jacksonville Beach, Fla. The festival is designed to raise public awareness of the critically endangered right whale, and the annual migration of the species to southeast U.S. coastal waters.

Each year, pregnant female North Atlantic right whales migrate southward more than 1,000 miles from their feeding area off Canada and New England to the warm, calm coastal waters off South Carolina, Georgia, and northeastern Florida. From Nov. 15 through April 15, right whales give birth and nurse their young in these waters, which are the only known birthing area for the species.

This outreach event will educate the public about right whale management and protection measures. Attendees will learn about the no approach rule, the importance of this region to right whales, how to recognize and avoid disturbing mother-calf pairs, the importance of reducing vessel speed and keeping a lookout when whales are present, and the value of protecting these amazing marine mammals. This will also be a unique opportunity talk with local right whale biologists who have studied this species for years.

This free one-day family-oriented festival will feature live music, kids' activities, and exhibits geared towards raising awareness and inspiring the community about these critically endangered whales. Food, arts, crafts, and right whale-related merchandise will be available for purchase.

Festival highlights include a beach clean-up at 9 a.m., and live music featuring The Hip Abduction (www.thehipabduction.com) at noon. A beach run will take place at 3 p.m. Participants can register

at http://www.performancemultisports.com/rightwhale5k.htm.

The festival is sponsored by NOAA's Fisheries Service, Ocean Conservancy, Save the Whales License Plate, Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute, and others. For a complete list sponsors and for more information about this event, please visit www.rightwhalefestival.org.

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